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ANCIENT SETTLEMENTS  
OF THE GANGA PLAIN: WEST BENGAL AND BIHAR

*As a leading researcher in the field of ancient Indian studies, Professor Bongard-Levin was a highly respected scholar in Calcutta in the 1960s. I had the privilege of knowing him personally through Professor Debi Prasad Chattopadhyay who used to publish during those days a scholarly journal under the title of Indian Studies: Past and Present. Once I also tried for a Ph.D scholarship to be able to work under him in Moscow. I met him from time to time in Delhi where I subsequently shifted, and we also met, although only briefly, in Cambridge. His scholarship and personal warmth for India and Indians have made him a greatly loved foreign scholar in my country. I am indeed very happy to be able to contribute an article to a volume dedicated to him.*

*Introduction*

This article is based on my survey work in the Ganga valley which is an alluvial plain of more than half-a-million square kilometres below the outer arc of the Himalayas and to the north of the northeastern alignment of the geologically older Indian Peninsula. As is only to be expected in such a large landmass, the valley has variations in rainfall, crop-pattern, drainage and even

historical and archaeological patterns and affiliations. Between 1981 and 1987 I undertook, on behalf of the Department of History, Delhi University, an archaeological survey of the southwestern *plateau* fringe of this valley<sup>1</sup>. This area is known as the Chhotanagpur *Plateau* which is spread for about a hundred thousand square kilometres, mostly in south Bihar and the western part of West Bengal, and to a limited extent, in the northern section of Orissa. This was followed by a short phase of study in the Bangladesh section of the Ganga plain on behalf of the Department of History of Jahangirnagar University<sup>2</sup> in Bangladesh. Since 1991 I have been engaged in a study of the location of ancient settlements in the Indian section of this plain, beginning with West Bengal. Annual reports have appeared in *South Asian Studies* (since 1992), the annual publication organ of the Society for South Asian Studies (in Britain), the principal sponsor of this ongoing work.

There are several reasons for undertaking this work. One of the most practical reasons is that many sites in the valley are getting destroyed in various ways because of population pressure and the consequent intensification and expansion of agricultural activities. There should be a basic record of these sites before many of them disappear altogether. Secondly, even where records are available, they are not very specific in many cases. The geographical coordinates are not known for many of the recorded sites, and it is seldom easy to track them down to the ground. Thirdly, even if one is interested in the mere location of sites, it is possible to gain some insight into the patterns of ancient landuse (i.e. the types of land preferred for cultivation by the ancient communities represented by archaeological village sites), major lines of movement (i.e. routes), utilization of raw materials as revealed through surface assemblages and thus some idea of local and regional trade, the possible delimiting areas of ancient political units, etc. simply by studying the location of a large number of sites in a given region. Fourthly, an

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<sup>1</sup> D. K. CHAKRABARTI, *Archaeology of Eastern India: Chhotanagpur Plateau and West Bengal*, Delhi, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> D. K. CHAKRABARTI, *Ancient Bangladesh*, Delhi, 1992.

overview of the ancient settlement history of the valley as a whole, seen through the eyes and understanding of a single person may be helpful in formulating programmes of micro-study in different portions of the valley.

From the point of view of the present paper it may be useful to discuss the distribution of sites in West Bengal and Bihar, the two sectors of the Ganga plain which we already have surveyed, through a number of maps. It must also be pointed out that ours is not an exhaustive survey; basically we have focused on the representative geographical areas of various "districts" and gather the field-details of the major sites in those areas. Our aim is only to outline the total distribution pattern of sites in the valley.

### West Bengal

#### *Map 1<sup>3</sup>: site inventory*

1. Kandan: it is a settlement site, visibly of c. 10th-12th centuries A.D. but with the possibility of being early historic; a "*stupa*" mound outside the main settlement.
2. Raikhan Dighi: potsherds (c. 10th-12th cent. A.D.) on the bank of a large (more than 1 km by C.0.5 km) tank.
3. Banpur: 2 stone sculptural pieces (c. 9th cent. A.D.); possibly the site of an ancient temple.
4. Bulbul Chandi: site of an ancient temple and sculpture (c. 10th-12th cent. A.D.)
5. Jagjivanpur: a *stupa* site of c. 9th cent. A.D. and later: currently under excavations by West Bengal government.
6. Fulbaria: ancient sculpture (c. 10th-12th cent. A.D.), but no other sign of occupation.
7. Pichhli Gangarampur: the site is now covered by mango-groves, but miscellaneous c. 10th-12th cent. A.D./ earlier sculptures have been reported from a large (c. 4 km by c.3 km) area; this may be the site of the Sena dynasty capital, Ramavati.
8. Jagdala: a mound with a number of "*Śivalingas*" and "*yonipattas*".
9. Sivdangi: a high temple mound with a large "*Śivalinga*" and "*yonipatta*" and architectural fragments

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<sup>3</sup> D. K. CHAKRABARTI - R.K. CHATTOPADHYAY, "Notes on the archaeology of Maldaha and West Dinajpur districts, West Bengal", in *South Asian Studies* 8 (1992), pp. 135-153.

10. Tungisahar: sculpture (Pala-Sena, c.8th-12th cent. A.D.), architectural fragments, structural mounds and general occupational deposit.
11. Ranigarh: a major mound inside an island-like village; large architectural pieces including standing pillars of the Pala-Sena period.
12. Amritakhandia Dhap: a structural mound of the Pala-Sena period.
13. Jabaripur: a structural mound of the Pala-Sena period.
14. Tarpan Dighi: a large settlement site of the Pala-Sena period on the bank of a tank which must have originally covered an area of 100 acres.
15. Bhaior: a temple mound with sculpture and architectural pieces of the Pala-Sena period.
16. Bangarh: an excavated early historic fortified site, but extensive traces of occupation including Pala-Sena period architectural and sculptural pieces outside the fortified area; also a sherd of Black-and-Red ware collected from the surface in the fortified area.
17. Mahipaldighi: miscellaneous structural remains on the bank of a large Pala period tank (originally more than 100 acres).
18. Nazirpur: a structural mound associated with a small tank.
19. Karanji: 2 structural mounds.
20. Ratan: a Pala-Sena period temple site with 2 Vishnu images.
21. Dehaband: a large occupational area full of structural remains and Pala-Sena period sculptures; also traces of a Gupta-post-Gupta period monastery.
22. Bairhatta: structural remains, Pala-Sena period sculptures and terracottas and a large number of ancient tanks.
23. Karandighi: miscellaneous traces of occupation including a Vishnu image of the Pala-Sena period.
24. Salanpur: ancient sculpture of the Pala-Sena period.
25. Porsa: a ruined temple site of the Pala-Sena period.
26. Amati: a large occupational site (c.175 km by 0.75 km) with tanks and structures.

The distribution of all the above-mentioned sites is in the present districts of Maldaha and West Dinajpur. The most visible signs of occupation are from the Pala-Sena period. A very large number of sculptures of this period from this area have already been parts of various museum collections, and even now there is a good number of such sculptures in the villages and small private collections. The landscape is dotted with large tanks which mostly date from this period. Historically this sector belongs to the ancient "*Pundravarddhana*" which also comprises the present Bangladeshi areas of Bagura, Rajsahi and Dinajpur. On the Bangladesh side both Gupta period and earlier sculptures are known in some abundance; however, they are by and large non-existent in the West Bengal sector. It is not that there was no early occupation here. Bangarh is a

well-known early historic site with NBP, and it is possible that modern excavations will lead to the find of a protohistoric Black-and-Red ware level at this site. In any case, outside Maldaha and West Dinajpur not much is known of the archaeological sites in the northern portion of West Bengal. The district of Darjiling is known only for the sporadic finds of undated neolithic celts associated with terraced fields in some areas. The district of Jalpaiguri in the "terai" area does not have anything earlier than Pala-Sena period remains, and it is possible that only during this period the jungles of this "terai" region were properly penetrated. The district of Kochbihar/Coochbehar is also little understood from the archaeological point of view. A Gupta-post-Gupta period fortification has been reported from this district, but that would need more research. There were two major routes to Tibet through this portion of West Bengal, one through the Chumbi valley and the other through Rajabhatkhawa and Bhutan, and both these routes could have been significant during the Pala-Sena period. This was also the period when the copper deposits of Buxa and Sikim which fall in this zone could have been worked.

#### *Map 2<sup>4</sup>*

The shaded portion of this map shows the distribution area of the Black-and-Red ware (BRW) – bearing settlements of West Bengal. The shaded portion in the northern area is based on the find of a single piece of BRW at Bangarh. It is still waiting to be authenticated by excavations. Otherwise, the distribution of these sites is in the districts of Birbhum, Murshidabad, Burdwan/Bardhaman, Bankura and Midnapur. More than 55 such sites have been documented all over this area. It is worth remembering that many of these sites bear early historic and later occupational

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<sup>4</sup> D. K. CHAKRABARTI, G. SENGUPTA, R. K. CHATTOPADHYAY, and N. LAHIRI, "Black-and-Red ware settlements in West Bengal", in *South Asian Studies* 9 (1993), p. 123-135.

remains as well. For instance, Tamluk or ancient Tamralipta is a famous early historic site, but this has yielded the earlier deposit of BRW as well. On the basis of the present evidence it may be said that the BRW occupation in West Bengal began around the middle of the second millennium B.C. or about 200 years earlier, and continued right up to the beginning of the early historic period. This represents the first phase of agricultural occupation in this region. There should be an earlier such phase too, but the evidence has not yet been found outside the site of Pandu Rajar Dhibi in the Burdwan district. It is difficult to be positive about it. In any case, the elements of their distribution suggest a number of facts about them. The concentration is still limited only to the west of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river and associated with a number of major and minor rivers which are all parts of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly system. It is probable that towards the end of the BRW phase there was a shift of population to the delta proper. Secondly, the BRW sites are located both in the agriculturally prosperous and poor areas. For instance, the site of Kherur in the Murshidabad district is in the Bhagirathi belt and thus located in an agriculturally rich area, whereas sites like Kumardanga and Saragdihi, both in the Bankura district, are in agriculturally poor zones. Thirdly, the sites of this phase are distributed in the ancient territorial units of *Uttara Radha*, *Dakshin Radha*, and *Suhma*, which are mentioned both in texts and inscriptions. It is possible that these ancient historical geographical units had protohistoric roots. Fourthly, wherever possible, the BRW settlements are located at the edge of the floodplains of the Ajay, Damodar and others. Some sites (cf. Kumardanga) are also located on the banks of rivers which have cut deep banks at those points and do not really have floodplains. In the dry months such rivers will be generally confined to a narrow channel between their banks, leaving wide margins on either side for winter cultivation (mostly vegetable cultivation). Another feature which is apparent is that at least some of these sites, especially the ones in the Birbhum and Burdwan districts, came up in the gaps in the local *Sal* forests which were fairly widespread in these areas even in the early part of this century. Finally, many of these settlements show a steady continuity of

occupation right up to the modern period, suggesting that the basic pattern of village life in modern West Bengal is firmly based in the protohistoric phase. It is also clear that there were both local and interregional interactions during this period. The local trade network is clear from the distribution of iron ores, different types of stone, etc. which could be collected within a distance of 20-25 km from some of these sites. Items such as copper and tin had to be procured from places about 300 km away in the Chhotanagpur *plateau* sector. The size-range of these settlements was from below one acre to about 8-9 acres.

### *Map 3<sup>5</sup>: site inventory*

This map shows some details of the distribution of BRW sites in West Bengal in the Survey of India sheet 73 M (scale 4:1).

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|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Mahisdal           | 20. Hatikra        | 39. Barabelun         |
| 2. Bahiri             | 21. Nachansaha     | 40. Arara             |
| 3. Surath Rajar Dhibi | 22. Potanda        | 41. Kurmun            |
| 4. Supur              | 23. Solkhana       | 42. ErUAR             |
| 5. Beluti             | 24. Behariya       | 43. Mangatkot         |
| 6. Nanur              | 25. Keora-Jinaipur | 44. Orgram            |
| 7. Kirnahar           | 26. Batikar        | 45. Berenda           |
| 8. Deuli              | 27. Bergram        | 46. Kalyanpur         |
| 9. Jayadev-Kenduli    | 28. Sindurtopa     | 47. Pandu Rajar Dhibi |
| 10. Mandira           | 29. Kusumjatra     | 48. Basantapur        |
| 11. Gurisha           | 30. Kagas          | 49. Bharatpur         |
| 12. Chella-Kamarpara  | 31. Nirbhaitala    | 50. Siuli Burir Dang  |
| 13. Jashpur           | 32. Kotasur        |                       |
| 14. Jashpur           | 33. Charkalgram    |                       |
| 15. Kendula           | 34. Gopalnagar     |                       |
| 16. Kurmitha          | 35. Kayera         |                       |
| 17. Khustikuri        | 36. Pokharna       |                       |
| 18. Mangaldihi        | 37. Saragdihi      |                       |
| 19. Hansra            | 38. Dihar          |                       |

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Three sites in this map – Pokhama (no. 36) , Kotasur (no. 32) and Mangalkot (no. 43) – went on to become major urban centres during the early historic period. Dihar (no. 38), although not as large as these two, was also an urban centre of the period. The distinctive thing about Kotasur is that it is fortified. There is no fortification at the other sites.

#### *Map 4<sup>6</sup>*

This map shows the configuration of early historic sites in the Bhagirathi delta. This was the Ganga mouth before c. 12th century A.D. since when the Padma channel began to be significant. Most of the water of the Ganga now joins the sea through the Padma channel in Bangladesh. However, this was not the case before c. 12th century A.D. The dotted line between Calcutta and Sagar Island shows the channel of the Ganga during the ancient period, possibly right up to the Pala-Sena period. Chandraketugarh and Tamluk are the most important sites on this map. Tamralipta/Tamluk is famous as an ancient port. It could not be adequately excavated because the modern town of Tamluk overlies the ancient settlement. There is no evidence to suggest that this city was surrounded by a fortification wall. One can, however, easily trace a fortification system at Chandraketugarh. Roughly it is a little more than 1 square km. However, there are extensive traces of early occupation outside the fortification walls. The site lies in a now-extinct drainage system known as the Bidyadhari system. Our inference is that this linked up with the Ganga flow in the area of Atghara which is marked on the map. One of the most important features of Tamluk, Chandraketugarh and most of the other sites marked on this map is the great quantity of urban type terracotta material dating from the Maurya to the Gupta periods, i.e. from the third century B.C. to the

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<sup>6</sup> D.K. CHAKRABARTI - R.K. CHATTOPADHYAY, "Archaeology of coastal West Bengal: Twenty-four Parganas and Midnapur districts", in *South Asian Studies* 10 (1994), pp. 135-160.



fifth century A.D. This material closely conforms to the Gangetic valley art idiom of the period. Another feature is a great abundance of semi-precious stone and glass beads. In addition, there is a wide range of artefactual remains which would be completely at home in any early historic archaeological assemblage of the Gangetic India. A major site (marked Harinarayanpur on the map) has been destroyed by the river over the last 30 years, leading to the recovery of a very large number of terracottas, beads and other artefacts (including a small piece of Mauryan sculpture made of limestone) from the river cliff. The sheer wealth of antiquities found at these sites suggests to us that at least 10/11 of them were urban sites: Chandraketurgh, Atghara, Chhatrabhog-Khari, Pakurtala, Mandirtala, Harinarayanpur, Deulpota-Rayer Chak, Tamluk, Tildah, Bahiri and possibly Boral. This is the most important and well-clustered configuration of urban sites in the Gangetic region, suggesting very clearly the tremendous importance this area had in the maritime activities of early historic India. An interesting sidelight on this maritime significance is thrown by the occurrence of terracotta objects modelled on Roman statuary. We have come across a number of unpublished terracotta heads shown wearing wreaths made of laurel leaves. There is absolutely no doubt that Bengal potters of the early historic period were familiar with Roman statuary. In the collection of Mr Arabinda Maity of Dharas village in the area of Manikabasan-Jai Kalir Chak of our map, we identified a complete Roman amphora. Mr Maity subsequently took a photograph of this amphora to the Department of Archaeology of West Bengal government. There have only been marginal (and basically unpublished) and uncoordinated excavations in the region.

The broad settlement history that one can thus trace for the Gangetic valley section of West Bengal is the following. In the adjacent *plateau* area of Chhotanagpur (Map 5) there is a very rich prehistoric sequence going back to the lower palaeolithic stage. The shaded area of Map 5 shows the area studied as a whole by us from this point of view. In the eastern section of this map (Birbhum-Bankura-Midnapur sector, including Burdwan) there is an overlap between this prehistoric background and the primary archaeological

picture of Gangetic West Bengal. For instance, in certain areas of Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura and Midnapur there are prehistoric sites ranging from the palaeolithic to the mesolithic. In the valley sections of the same areas we can trace BRW sites of the second millennium B.C. and later. The settled life in the Gangetic plain takes off with the BRW stage. We have seen its presently known distribution pattern. Early historic and later historic occupations are sharply focused not merely in the same area but also outside it. Our impression is that the present landscape of West Bengal dates very clearly from the Pala-Sena period. By this period virtually all parts of the modern state of West Bengal including the "terai" jungles of the north, the estuaries of the delta fringe and the rugged interior sections of Purulia, came to be settled.

### South Bihar

#### *Map 6<sup>7</sup>: site inventory*

1. Jhimjhimiya-Kalishthan: a thin BRW deposit overlain by a substantial early historic phase, more than one mound in this area, roughly in the outskirts of Rajmahal.
2. Sahibganj: architectural fragments and sculptures suggesting Pala period temple (s) here.
3. Sakrigali: a sculpture of c. 8th cent. A.D.; possibility of the existence of a temple at this major ferry crossing.
4. Patharghata: known principally for a sculptured, apparently Vaishnavite, relief of c. 6th cent. A.D carved on a hillside on the bank of the Ganga, the place has a later (Pala period) temple, a major rock-cut cave, an assortment of black stone sculptures; also, beyond the hills on the river bank, there is a BRW site at the village of Oriup, and at some distance away beyond Oriup, one can see the excavated ruins of Vikramaśīla monastery of the Pala period. Patharghata was a ferry point.
5. Antichak: the site of Vikramaśīla monastery, not far from modern Kahaigaon which has a rock-cut temple in a rock subject to flooding by the monsoonal Ganga.

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<sup>7</sup> D.K. CHAKRABARTI, A.K. PRASAD, S.K. JHA, K. ANAND, R.K. CHATTOPADHYAY, "Preliminary observations on the distribution of archaeological sites in the south Bihar plains", in *South Asian Studies* 11 (1995), pp. 129-147.

6. Champa: a tremendously impressive early historic urban site – c.50 acres of raised and walled citadel looking over a linear stretch of c. 1 km along the river bank.
7. Kheri hill: a hill top religious place with sculptures (one in red sandstone dating from the 1st-2nd cent. A.D.).
8. Sultanganj: known for the ruins of a Buddhist monastery which yielded more than a life-size copper Buddha image, the place shows at the edge of the bed of the Ganga the rock of Jahangira which bears rock-hewn sculptural figures and reliefs from c. 5th- 6th cent. onwards.
9. Mandar hill: the place known for a 7th cent. A.D. inscription, a contemporary tank at the foot of the hill and miscellaneous sculptural remains.
10. Munger: a Pala period settlement but with early historic antecedence.
11. Uren: c.30 acre occupational deposit containing structural mounds, sculptures, etc. of the Pala period, with uncertain earlier antecedence.
12. Jalpa: a c. 12th cent. A.D. temple site at an edge of the Kharagpur hills.
13. to 15. Valgudar-Rajaona-Nongarh: a cluster of sites spread for several kilometres on the western bank of the Kiul river, with sculptures dating from the first-second and fifth-sixth centuries A.D.
16. Indpe: a large walled site dating possibly not earlier than Gupta-post-Gupta period and possessing large structural ruins and sculptures.
17. Jamui: architectural fragments (Pala period) in the vicinity of the place.
18. Patna: Pataliputra lies buried under the heavily built up area of modern Patna City, and from this point of view whatever has been done by way of excavations here has been done only in the peripheries of the old city.
19. Maner: a neolithic and later settlement located on the cliff of a dried-up bank of the Ganga.
20. Masarh: known for the find of a fragment of capital of an Aśokan column, it has well spread out occupational deposit, structural ruins and later sculptures.
21. Buxar: the large early historic city site has been mostly destroyed.
22. Chausa: c. 15-20 acres of ancient mound going back to the early historic period are still there.
23. Deo Markandeya: a Pala period sun temple site with earlier (up to BRW) occupational deposit.
24. Deo Baranarak: a Pala period sun temple site with the partly surviving brick temple, an assortment of contemporary sculptures, an array of "Gupta" pillars and extensive occupational ruins in the modern village.
25. Mundeśvari: mostly intact Gupta period temple on a hill-top in the interior of the Kaimur hills.
26. Senuar: a neolithic and later site.
27. Deo: the site of a Pala period temple.
28. Deo Umga: a well-preserved mud-walled complex of c. 60 acres - undated, but with Pala period temple complex in the nearby hill.
29. Bodhgaya: a neolithic and later site.
30. Kurkihar: a large occupational mound of the Pala period.
31. Koch: a large settlement site of the Pala period, including a large number of sculptures and a partly surviving Pala period brick temple.
32. Sonpur: a BRW and later site, perhaps even neolithic.

33. Itkhorī: a Pala period settlement and religious site in a previously forested section of the Chhotanagpur *plateau*.
34. Nawada: a large number of sculptures and architectural fragments of the Pala period in the vicinity of the place.
35. Rajgir: religious ruins inside the area enclosed by the hills, contemporary city site outside this area; no distinction between "old" and "new" Rajgirs.
36. Devangarh: a fortified early historic site (c. 85 acres) known to have yielded sculptures dated between 1st cent. B.C. and 1st cent. A.D. – later remains as well.
37. Miari: a large BRW and NBP site.
38. Kenar Chatti: a structural site of the Pala period with BRW and NBP antecedence.
39. Pavapuri: no detectable ancient occupation deposit at this place associated with the death of Mahavira.
40. Bihar Sharif: partly surviving high mound in the modern town.

If one studies the foregoing inventory sector by sector, a few interesting points emerge. The capital of the former kingdom of Anga – Champa – is without doubt the primate settlement between Rajmahal and Munger. This overshadows everything else in this sector. Secondly, the boundary between Anga and Magadha should be based on the Kharagpur hills and the Kiul river. In the Pataliputra sector, the ancient city looks toward north Bihar; in the area where it is located, it is bounded by marshes or lowlying lands. Secondly, in this sector one notes the river bank location of the neolithic site of Maner. In the area of Magadha as a whole, the Gaya-Rajagriha-Patna belt was undoubtedly the core-belt, and one notes that in no case have the archaeological excavations been extensive in this area or even oriented towards the recovery of its general settlement character. The neolithic antecedence of a place like Bodhgaya and the excavations of Senuar and Maner make us aware of the rich possibility of the neolithic substratum of the early historic Magadha. Further, the location of a city site like Devangarh in an area fringing the Chhotanagpur *plateau* reinforces our earlier hypothesis that Rajgir, located at the Magadhan end of the Rajgir-Paithan trade route, i.e. early historic Gangetic valley - Deccan trade route, was likely to have mediated the resources of the Chhotanagpur *plateau* along this route. The extremely rich nature of occupation of the Magadhan area in the Pala period deserves notice too. The Gupta period remains are less visible, but perhaps they will be extensively

discovered when the Pala sites are properly excavated. It is probable that the whole phase from the Guptas to the Palas constitutes one archaeological block.

### North Bihar

#### *Map 7<sup>8</sup>: site inventory*

1. Thakurganj: possibly the site of a Pala period temple.
2. Kanhaiyaji: a structural mound and Pala period sculpture.
3. Borijangarh: a major temple and sculptural site of the Pala period.
4. Gangasagar and Jivaj: a Pala period temple site associated with large tanks.
5. Sikligarh: a c. 200 acres site within mud fortification walls and uninscribed fragments of a Mauryan column outside the fortified area.
6. Mahendrapur: the site of a Pala period temple.
7. Purnea town: locally discovered Pala period Vishnu images.
8. Sisia: the site of a Pala period sculpture.
9. Kandaha sun temple: a Pala period temple site.
10. Mahisi: a Pala period temple site.
11. Singhesvara Śiva temple: a Pala period temple site.
12. Pirmagar: a fortified Pala period settlement with a moat around it.
13. Jhikatiya: the site of a collapsed Pala period temple, with the burnt brick walls of the sanctum still standing and the lintel and doorframes collapsed in a heap.
14. Birpur: a Pala period sun temple site.
15. Naulagarh: an early historic (NBP) fortified city site continuing well into the Pala period.
16. Jai Mangala Garh: a large Pala period structural site with NBP antecedence.
17. Pandavsthan: a c. 2 acres NBP site.
18. Chechar-Kutubpur: a Pala period linear settlement on the bank of the Ganga with neolithic and BRW phases.
19. Kanthudi - Mahadeodih-Saharandih - Khojpur: basically structural sites of the Pala period.
20. Balirajgarh: an early historic (NBP) fortified site of a little less than 1 square km.
21. Andhrathari-Pastana: two neighbouring sites, Andhrathari with BRW, NBP etc. and Pastana being essentially a *stupa* site of the Pala period.

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<sup>8</sup> D.K. CHAKRABARTI, A. K. PRASAD, S. K. JHA, A.C. VERMA, "From Purnea to Champaran: the distribution of sites in the north Bihar plains", in *South Asian Studies* 12 (1996), pp. 147-158.

22. Kopagarh - Miran Than - Paraswadih - Bara Pokhar: these are neighbouring sites, all except Kopagarh, being Pala period structural sites. Kopagarh (c. 70 acres) is an early historic fortified settlement.
23. Kapileśvara Śiva - Rajeśvara Śiva: Pala period structural sites.
24. Uchchhaitha - Akaura-Pumadih: all Pala period structural sites, Purnadih being an intact *stupa* mound.
25. Sursand - Birakh - Parihar - Dhekuli: all Pala period structural sites.
26. Katragarh: fortified early historic (NBP) settlement.
27. Brahamdih - Kharaunadih-Raharladih - Paheldih - Ladauriadih - Chamauria-dih: sites with BRW and later pottery.
28. Vaiśali: early historic city site.
29. Konhara Ghat - Ram Chowra - Salempur: a major configuration of early historic and later settlements.
30. Ketaki-Lachchhi: a Gupta to Pala period settlement (c. 8 acres).
31. Ami: a high structural mound of the Pala period.
32. Chirand-Revelganj: only a small part of the Chirand settlement (neolithic and later) excavated whereas the modern village of Revelganj overlies a mound (Pala period and earlier).
33. Manjhi: a fortified early historic site with structural traces outside fortification.
34. Dighoa-Dhanoli-Papaur: Pala period structural sites, with Papaur being partly earlier.
35. Don Buzurg - Amarpur: Pala period structural sites.
36. Jamalhata - Thawe Singhasini Bhavani Mandir: Pala period structural sites.
37. Kesariya: an undated (but possibly post-Gupta) but well-preserved high *stupa* mound.
38. Lauriya-Areraj: inscribed Aśokan pillar.
39. Sitakund-Bedi: Pala period *stupa* and monastic sites.
40. Bisa sagar: an undated *stupa* site (jungle-covered).
41. Rampurwa: Aśokan column fragments.
42. Chankigarh: undated but huge and high burnt brick-platform.
43. Lauriya Nandangarh: Aśokan column and excavated temple and *stupa* site

In the foregoing list there are two neolithic settlements: Chirand and Chechar Kutubpur. Both of them are located immediately on the river banks (the Ganga bank in both cases). Further, in later periods Chechar-Kutubpur could mark a ferry point from Pataliputra for the Samastipur and Begusarai areas. Another ferry point of this type could be marked by Konhara Ghat-Ram Chowra sector, from where one could travel up to Vaiśali and beyond. The presence of genuine chalcolithic BRW settlements is not yet certain in north Bihar beyond the Ganga sector, and the concentration of early historic fortified city sites in north Bihar seems to be in its central sector, thus suggesting that the territorial terms of *Videha*, *Vajji* and

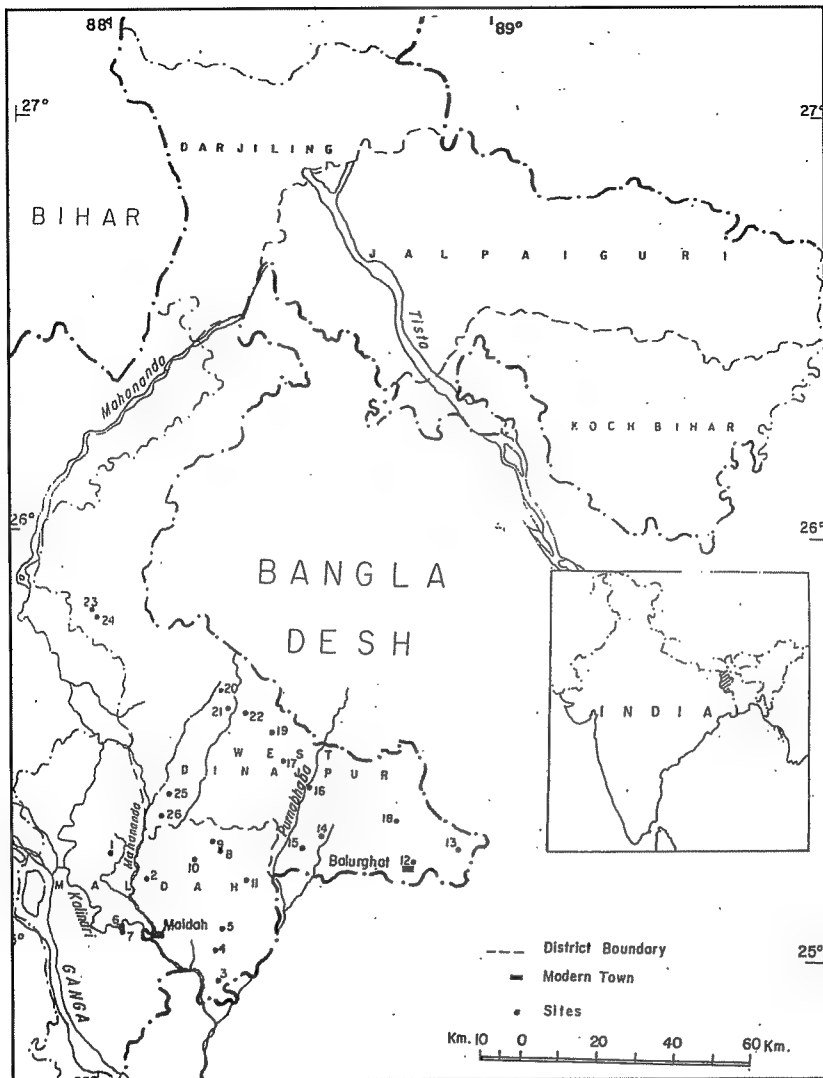
*Tirabhukti* all possibly denoted this central sector. An interesting feature is the presence of the fragments of a Mauryan column at Sikligarh outside a large fortified settlement. Geographically the site lies straight on a route from Pataliputra to Mahasthangarh.

### *General Discussion*

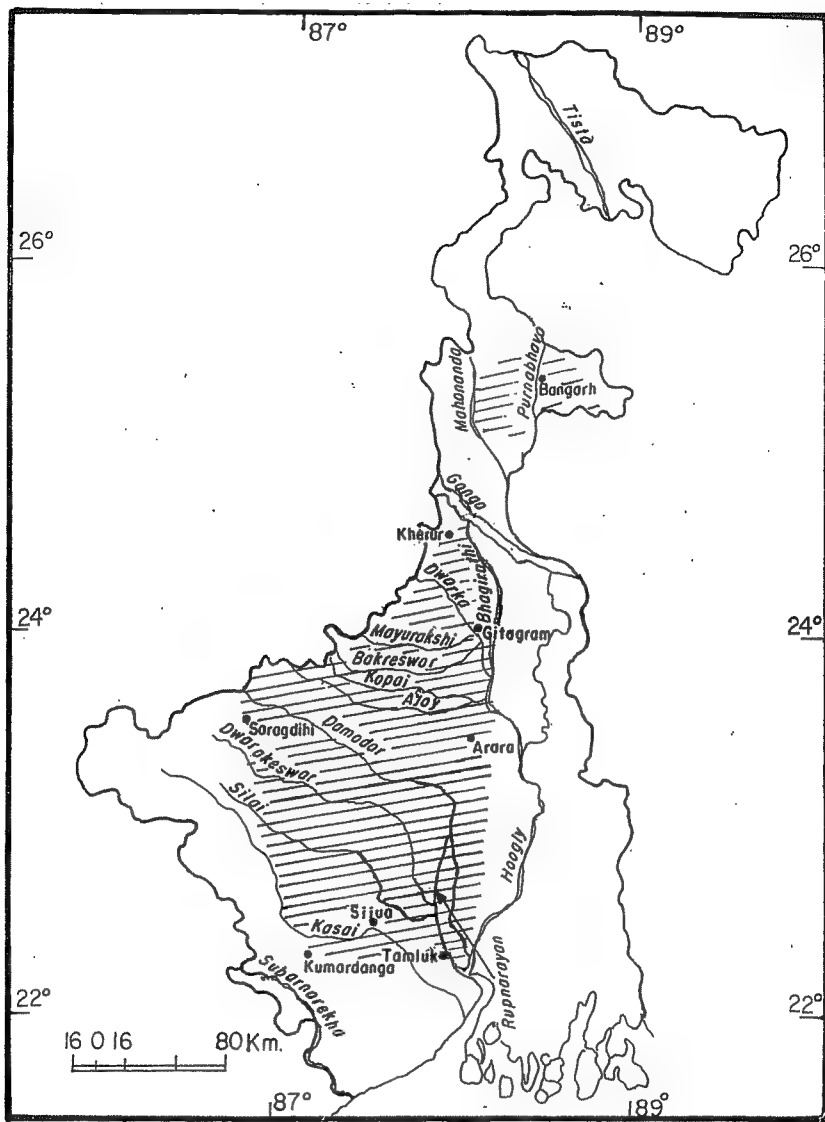
As one can easily make out, our survey is far from being exhaustive, but all the sites mentioned in the foregoing lists have been personally checked out and are certainly representative settlements of their areas. No geographically representative area has been neglected by us. On this basis one can raise a whole host of major issues. Here we take cognizance of only a few of them. First, the issue of neolithic beginnings in this part of the Ganga valley is not clear. In West Bengal, except the basal levels of Pandu Rajar Dhibi and Tamluk, no level can even be considered as neolithic, and even at these two places excavation of the basal level has been very marginal. On the basis of such marginal exposures it is best not to claim neolithic status for these levels. In Bihar the evidence at Taradih (i.e. Bodhgaya), Senuar, Maner, Chirand and Chechar-Kutubpur is certain. The basal level at Chirand should go well into the third millennium B.C. and by and large denotes the range of the neolithic in this part of the Ganga valley. But what is interesting in Bihar is the widespread character of this horizon. Secondly, the steady continuity of settlements here right from the neolithic to the Pala period (cf. Bodhgaya, Chechar-Kutubpur) is interesting in the sense that this suggests a basic continuum in settlement pattern for such a long period. With the development of the BRW level which possibly spans the whole of the second millennium B.C. (or most of it, anyway) in Bihar and West Bengal, the excavated data are much sharper, perhaps because of the more extensive nature of excavations. Even now, its presence in the north Bihar plains beyond the Ganga bank is uncertain. When one comes to early history one almost shudders at the lack of work done systematically at such sites as Pataliputra, Champa, Rajgir, Tamluk, Chandraketugarh and other

more recently excavated places (cf. Balirajgarh, Katragarh, Kotasur, Manjhi). One also notes that a number of important early historic sites (cf. Naulagarh, Devangarh, Kopagarh, Sikligarh) have not been subjected to excavations at all. Equally distressing is the fact that the whole of the Ganga mouth in West Bengal, undoubtedly one of the most significant early historic areas of the subcontinent, has not yet attracted any programme of prolonged excavations. The Pala period remains are the most visible of the archaeological ruins in our entire region, but beyond *stupas* and monasteries nothing is known about the ordinary settlements of this period.

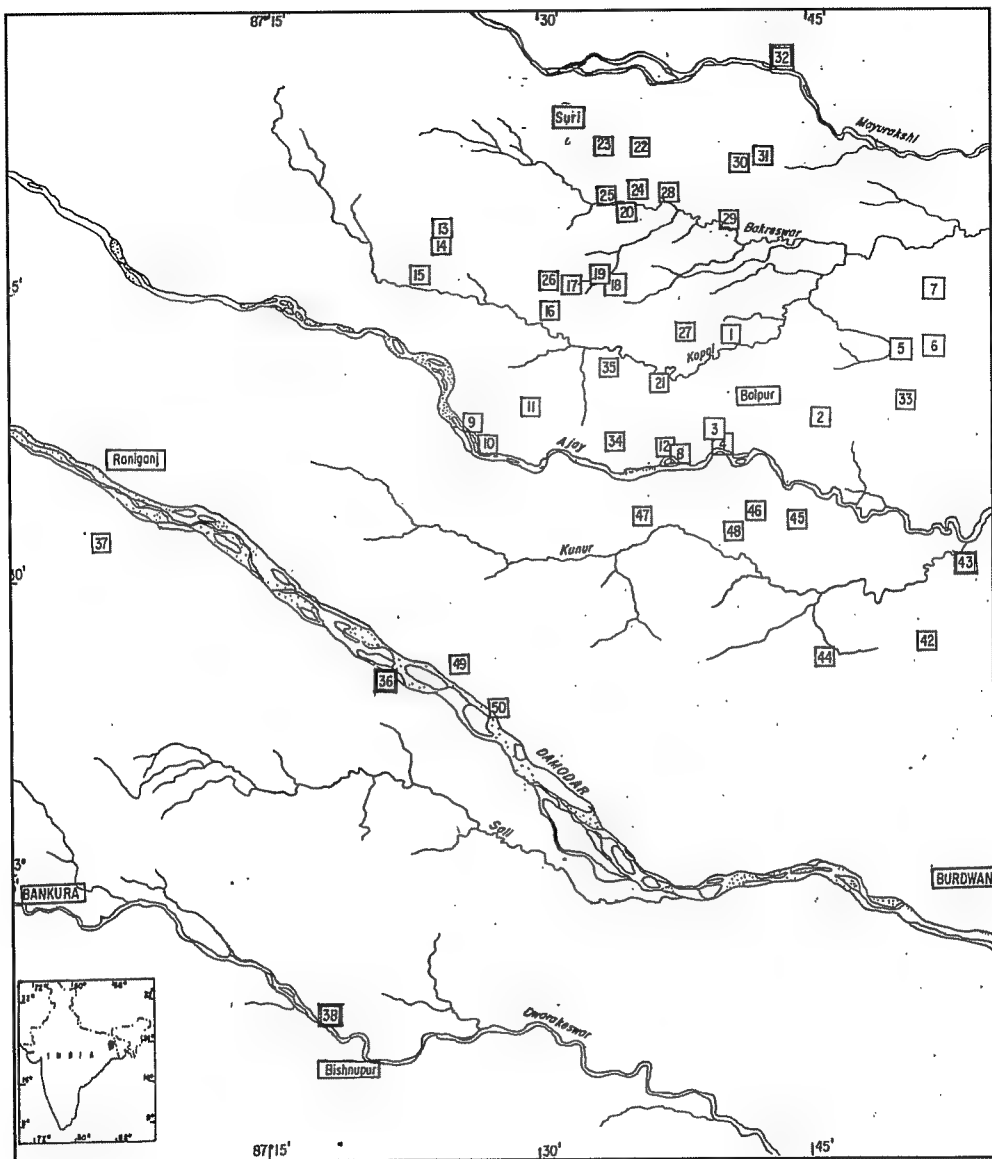




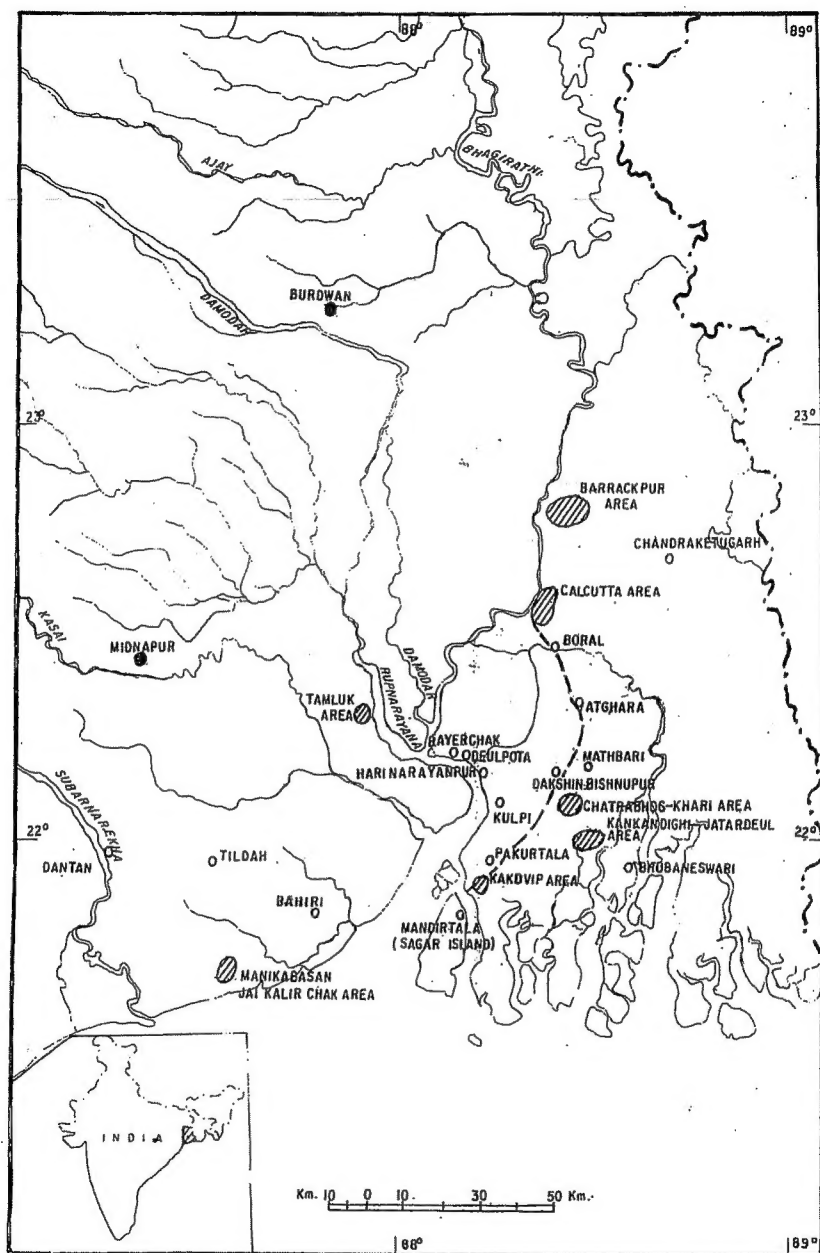
Map 1



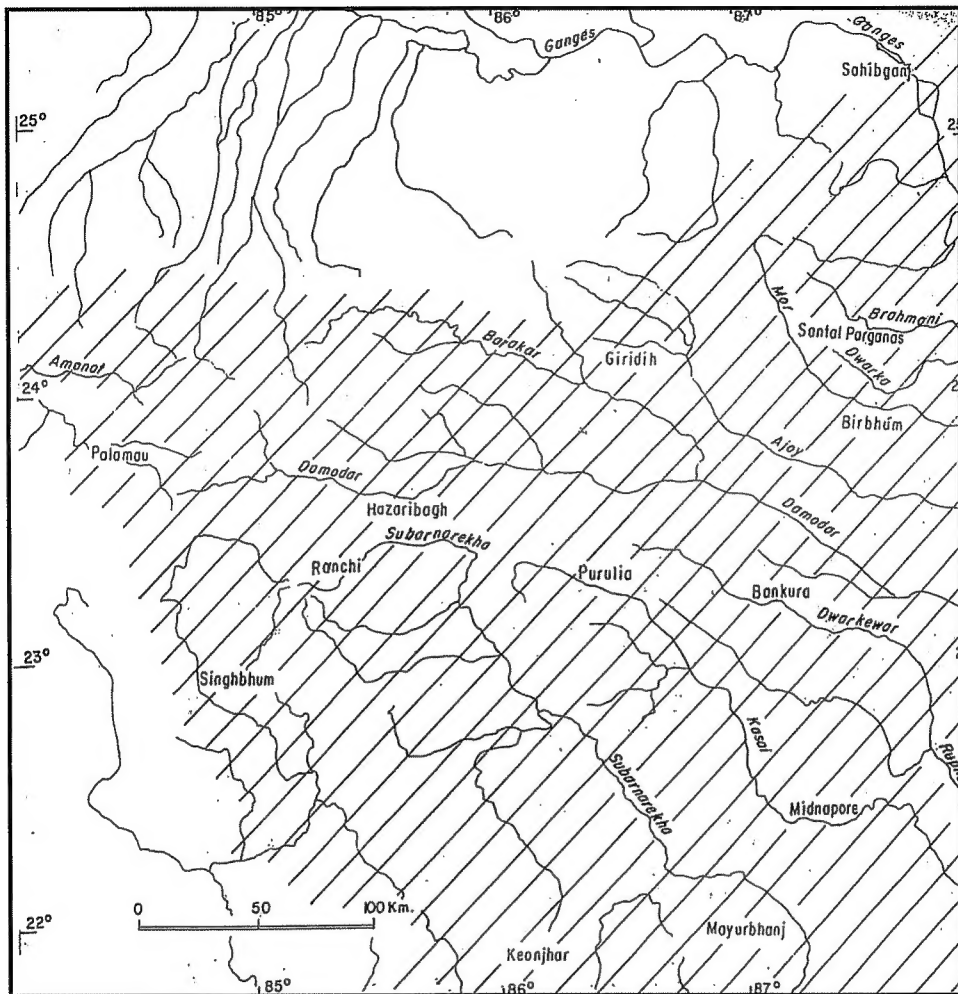
Map 2



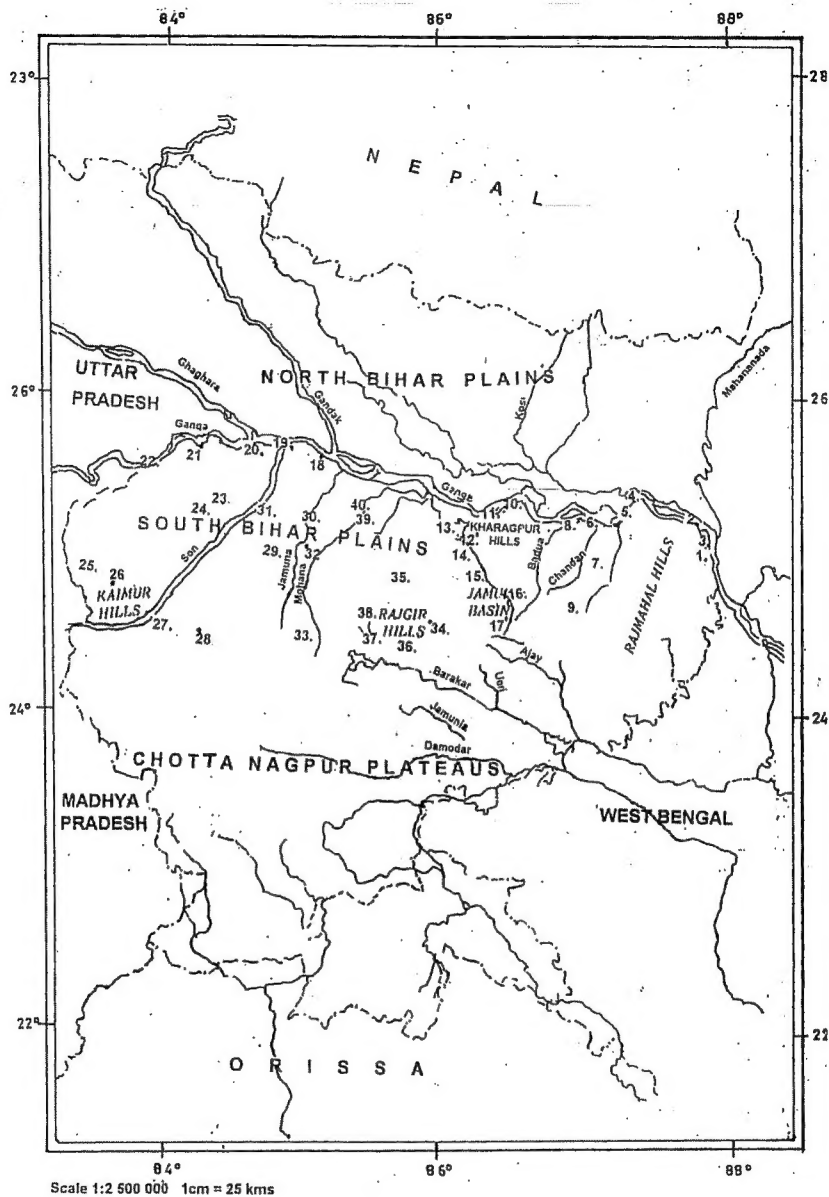
Map 3



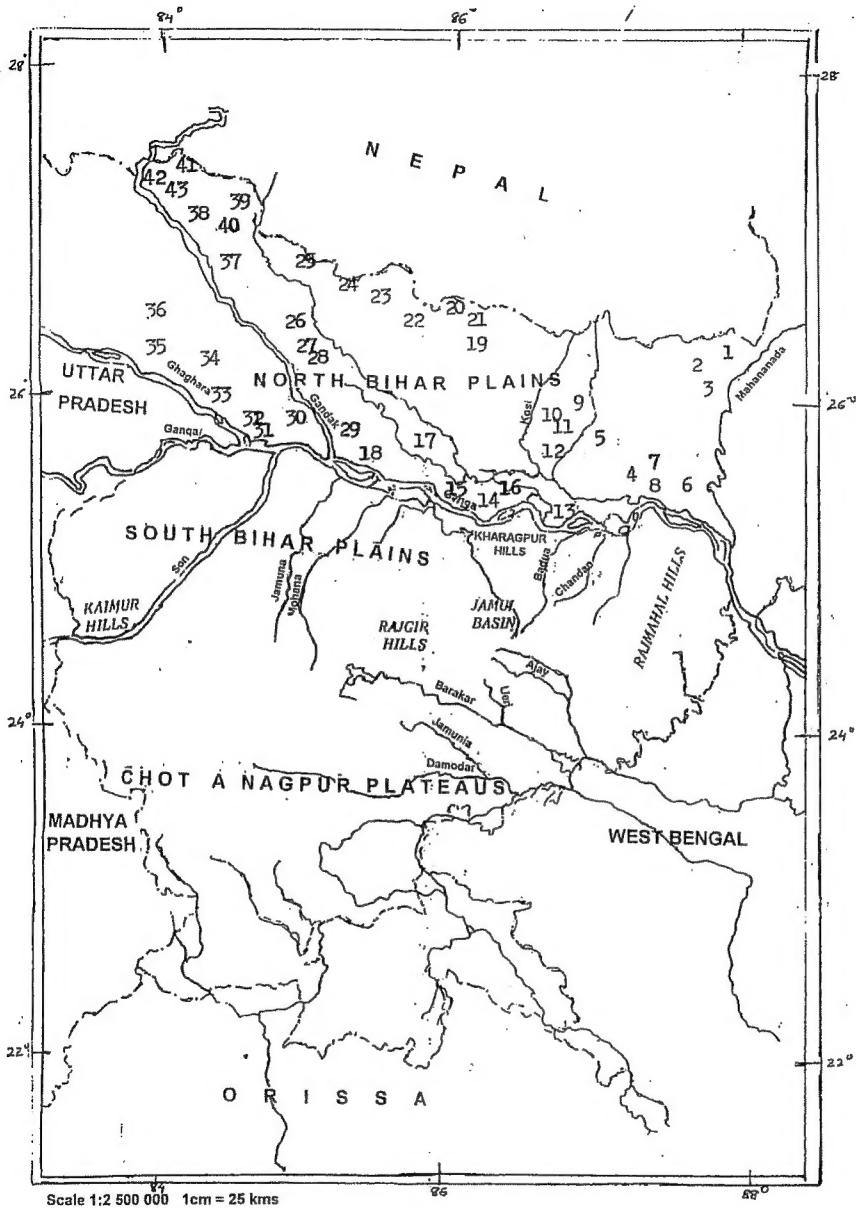
Map 4



Map 5



Map 6



Map 7